

An Introduction to Marine Life

by Robyn Wilson, Mark Norman and Anna Syme

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For many people, the first experience of marine environments is amazement at the bewildering variety of life in the oceans. Without experience or a good guide, the untrained observer cannot identify easily the many different marine plants and animals; cannot tell the difference between a shrimp and a prawn.

Sea anemones and corals, sea stars and sea urchins, octopuses and squids are just a few marine creatures that we never encounter on land or in freshwater. Many other creatures are even less familiar, and it is often difficult for those interested in marine life to learn more about them. The aim of this introductory book is to introduce the diversity of life in the seas and to help newcomers to marine biology recognise the main kinds of marine organisms. The examples selected in this introductory guide focus on Victoria and southern Australia. The emphasis is on animals and plants that are commonly seen by divers, snorkellers, beachcombers, rock poolers, and by anyone with an interest in marine life.

This *Guide* has a simple and easy-to-follow layout, and is divided into two major sections. The first section comprises a series of nine Quick Guides, which are grouped around particular themes. The first four Guides compare and contrast types of creatures that often puzzle people new to identifying marine life:

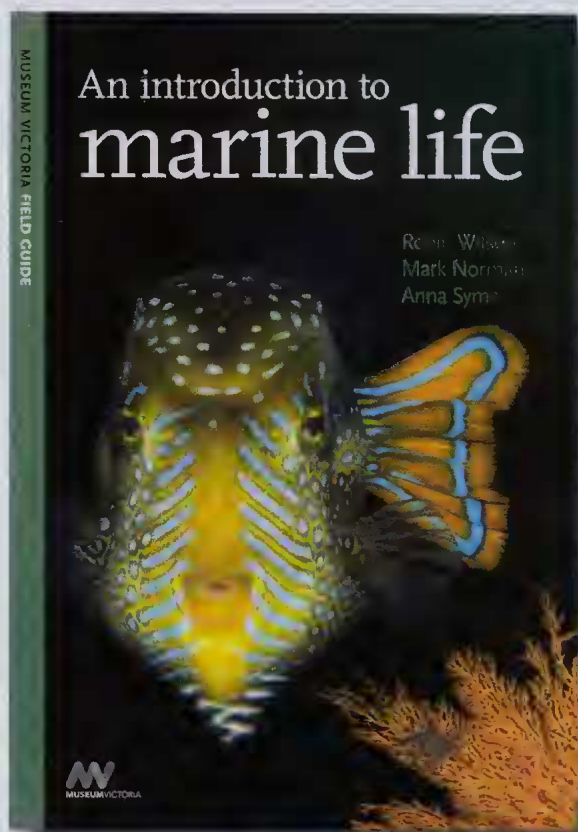
- 1 – plants and plant-like animals
- 2 – organisms that make coral-like growths
- 3 – worms, slugs and similar animals
- 4 – jellyfish and other floating animals

The next two Quick Guides treat groups of commonly-encountered marine life:

- 5 – beach-washed remains and skeletons
 - 6 – species commonly used as fishing bait
- The last three treat potentially dangerous and introduced species:
- 7 – hazardous marine life – stings and venoms
 - 8 – hazardous marine life – poisons, bites and other dangers
 - 9 – introduced species

This first part of the book can be used to help readers find the scientific name and classification for many common creatures.

The second major section of *An Introduction*



is the Gallery of Marine Life, in which all commonly encountered marine creatures are treated in their correct classification. The Gallery of Marine Life covers all creatures that are already mentioned in the Quick Guides, but now related organisms are grouped together. Each Phylum, Subphylum or Class is described and illustrated with local examples. Tips on identification and comments on diversity and ecology are also

provided. Those readers who wish to identify marine invertebrates to a greater level of detail are directed to the 'Further Information' at the end of the book, where pointers are provided to relevant publications and other resources.

This initial book in the series of guides is produced in stunning colour, as indeed are all of the volumes in the series.



Gorgonian fan coral. Photo reproduced from page 44 of *An Introduction to Marine Life*, with permission of the publisher.